

## The Library Situation in Chicago High Schools

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*The first of three papers read before the English Section of the Chicago High and Normal School Association, May 11, 1912.*

ABOUT three years ago, Mrs. Dracass, of the Englewood High School, began an investigation into library conditions in the high schools of Chicago and other cities, both east and west. The amount of material which she collected was so great that she found herself unable to handle it alone, so a committee of the library section of the association went to her assistance last fall. The results of the questionnaire which she prepared and sent out in November and December, 1911, have been tabulated, and certain facts seem to be of sufficient importance to the teachers in general to warrant their presentation in condensed form to this English section.

For the sake of convenience the presentation will be given under three heads: the conditions in Chicago schools, the conditions in schools outside of Chicago, and the possibilities that seem within our immediate reach. As to the last, we do not aim to present an ideal scheme, but one which will, in our belief, work a material improvement over present conditions, and which at the same time, there is some hope of realizing at once or in the very near future.

But in order to make clear what can be done, and to endeavor to enlist your aid in its accomplishment, it is first necessary to review broadly what each of you knows in part; namely, the present situation here. The library facilities and practice in the different city schools vary widely. According to the replies to the questionnaire, three schools are wholly without libraries. In the sixteen other schools that replied, the number of books varies from 825 to 7,400. Five schools run circulating departments. The reference-room facilities, where there are any, vary from a seating capacity of sixteen to one of 144. In ten schools the library is in charge of a teacher; in one, of a clerk; and in two, has been closed for lack of an attendant. These ten teachers have, in addition to the library work, regular class work; four of them having four classes, and six of them five.

But such statistics as these are meaningless to the general

teacher, so we will pass on to some queries as to the practical use of the library as it is conducted to-day. Is your school library justifying its existence? Is it doing what it could and should, considering that from \$600 to \$4,000 is invested there in books alone? Can you send a pupil to look up a reference and feel reasonably sure that he will get it? Is there any one in your school who knows exactly what is in the library? I do not except even the teacher in charge, for I know from experience that a teacher doing regular work has no time to become familiar with the books in subjects outside of his own line. Nobody but the one in charge of a library has any idea of how many pupils are turned away unsatisfied; and for every one turned away, two fail to come. Could not the library be of enough importance in your own subject to warrant having somebody there who could direct the pupils in the use of the books? It is useless to say that the teacher himself should do this, for the teacher is usually in a class when the pupil wants the book. Have you not bought books yourself rather than insist that those which are the property of the school be put in some central place and by means of proper cards and attendants be made available to all who wish to use them? Do your pupils know how to use the dictionary and encyclopedia, to say nothing of the more specialized books of reference? If not, should they not be definitely taught? Are there magazines in your library that meet the demands of the vocational trend of the times, in commerce, trades, modern inventions? Does the library supply the demand for home reading books, and does it do its duty in the general elevation of the pupils' taste in literature?

Some contend that the public library and its branches are already doing all that is necessary for the high school. The facts, however, hardly bear out the contention. The public library caters, primarily, to the desultory reader, young children, mechanics, foreigners, and adult research workers, and only incidentally to pupils of high-school age. Moreover, from the schools that are most conveniently situated with regard to branches, comes the complaint that not enough copies of any one book can be obtained at any one time to meet the needs of the classes. This is particularly true of books assigned for home reading. There is, furthermore, practically

no hope of any improvement in the near future. Mr. Legler has said that nothing can be thought of in connection with branches in the schools for at least ten years; moreover, there is serious question whether such branches, which must be open to the general public as well as to the pupils, would not be more of a menace than a benefit.

Of the definite attempts to meet the high-school needs in the high-school libraries themselves, I shall outline only two:—that at the Tuley, chosen because I know most about it; and that at the Englewood, chosen because it is along the line of what the library committee hopes may become general.

At the Tuley there is a reference room seating about sixty, and a stack room adjoining, containing some 3,000 volumes, of which half are fiction. Both reference and circulating departments are in operation. The work is in charge of the teacher of the third and fourth year English, who has five classes in addition to the library work. The librarian is assisted by six pupil volunteers, who practically take charge of the circulating department. They are given some training, and, under the supervision of the librarian, accession, catalog, and care for the books. In the circulating department an attempt is made to supply sufficient duplicate titles of the popular books that are recommended for book reports, to meet the demands reasonably. An attempt is made also to have illustrative material for use in the study of the history of literature. Pupils must apply for books before nine o'clock in the morning, and the orders are filled by the pupil assistants as they have time during the day. The average circulation this year has been about thirty volumes daily.

The reference department is run on the honor system, with open shelves. The teachers in the different subjects take from the regular shelves the books needed at any one time, and place them in special cases—one for English history, one for American history, etc., and the pupils are directed to those cases. General reference books, declamation and debating books, etc., are also in special cases, open to the pupils at all times. It is understood that books in these cases are not to be taken from the room during the day, and may not be drawn on a pupil's card for longer than one night. A teacher is assigned to the reference room for each hour of the day to keep

order; and any pupil who is above 75 in all his studies for any month has the privilege of going there during his study hours the next month.

This plan works fairly well for the circulating department, except that the time for drawing books is too short. Since the pupil assistants take full work, it is impossible to ask them to give much of their study time to library work, and, therefore, the rule has to be enforced that all applications for books be made before school in the morning. With somebody in the library each period who expected to devote his time to that work, the circulation could be doubled at least.

In the reference department, however, the Tuley plan is woefully lacking. The librarian is present only ten hours a week. The pupil assistants do not know the contents of the books, and the teacher in charge of the reference room is there for police duty, and in general is not familiar with the books outside those of his own department. Even when the librarian is present, it is no unusual thing for him to be found lacking in knowledge of the contents of the books outside those of his own department and those of general reference. He needs more time in the library, more time to analyze the books minutely for the card catalog. Were this done, the pupil assistants or the teacher in charge could tell what books, for example, contain copies of *Magna Charta*.

The Englewood plan is a step in advance of this. In that school a course in Library Economics has been established, which at present is being taken by forty-four pupils. The training and value of that course are foreign to the present discussion, so they will not be given here; but those who are interested may find an account of them in the April (1912) number of *The English Journal*, under the title "An Experiment in Library Training in the High School". The course, as outlined, calls for one hour per week of service work, so that for each period of each day there is in the library a trained pupil who expects to devote his time to waiting on those who come to the exchange desk.

The plant consists of a reference room seating sixteen, a stack room with a capacity for 10,000 volumes, and a work room, or laboratory, for the library course. There are in the reference room about 150 volumes of general reference, and in



the stack room 7,400 volumes, of which 1,500 are fiction. In the work room, and not available for lack of cataloging, are over 1,000 more volumes of bound and unbound magazines, government documents, etc. Both circulating and reference departments are conducted. The circulating department is open from 8:30 to 2:30, and the average daily circulation is 80. As at the Tuley, a definite attempt is made to supply reasonably the demands for home reading; as many as thirty copies of some books being on the shelves.

Except for books of general reference, the closed-shelf system is used; that is, the pupil cannot go to the cases and help himself to a book on history, etc. This is necessitated by the few copies of such books in comparison with the large demand for them. Any pupil may go to the reference room by permission, but is expected to stay only so long as necessary; that is, this is a reference room only, whereas that at the Tuley is both reading and reference room. The difference in the seating capacity explains this.

The work is in charge of a teacher-librarian who has four classes, besides the library work. A teacher is assigned to the reference room each hour, who is expected to aid the pupil assistant, when there is such a rush that two are needed, or when the pupil is asked something which he cannot answer. A point to be noted here is that whereas at the Tuley the teacher is assigned to the reading room for police duty only, at the Englewood he is there for library work.

That this is in advance of the Tuley plan is shown, for one thing, by the difference in circulation. With the same number of fiction books, the comparison is, Englewood  $1\frac{7}{9}$  as many pupils as Tuley, circulation  $2\frac{2}{3}$  as many, or  $1\frac{1}{2}$  times as many books per pupil. And in this comparison it must be remembered that in the Tuley circulation are counted one-night books of reference, which is not done at Englewood. This superiority of the Englewood circulation is undoubtedly due in large part to the fact that pupils can get books at any time.

Owing to lack of data, it is impossible to compare the reference departments, but like the librarian at the Tuley, the one at Englewood is far from satisfied. She has plenty of help, but no time to supervise them. The pupils analyze the

books and make tentative analytics, but lack of time prevents the librarian from checking up their work promptly, and thus the card catalog is never quite up to date. During the past year, about 4,000 cards have been made for the catalog. When it is borne in mind that the tentative cards made by the pupil for any book must be compared with the book to see if they are sufficient in number and proper in kind, and that permanent cards must be proof read, it will be evident that this part of the work alone is comparable in its demands on the teacher's time to the work in English composition.

In short, the situations at these two schools sum up to the same conclusion, viz.: the librarian needs time to become familiar with the books, time to analyze them minutely, time to put the card catalog in such shape that the needs of the pupils in all subjects can be met by anyone who is in the library and who can read English.

Now, perhaps a word as to just what this means will not be amiss. It is generally believed that when a book has an author card and a title card, it is cataloged. This is far from the truth. The card catalog is to the library what the index is to the book. Subject cards are the important things in reference work. The Chicago Public Library, with its many thousands of books, may make only two or three subject cards for each book, for it has some ten to a hundred volumes on each subject; but the small library, one of five thousand volumes or fewer, must go much further. An expert cataloger for a public library says that for a small library every subject that occupies ten pages in a book should be recorded in the card catalog. The librarians for the Los Angeles (Calif.) high-school libraries say that many subjects that occupy only one-half page, or sometimes even one sentence, should be cataloged. Do you realize what this means? Do you realize what peculiar books the high-school librarian deals with? A large part of them are school texts, which contain in their introductions very valuable material, which is not duplicated anywhere in the library. How is it to be found? When you tell your pupils to find the different meanings of the word "romance", do *you* know that in the introduction to the Lake Classics edition of "The House of Seven Gables" is Hawthorne's definition? The librarian ought to know it if he is to give the

pupils the full benefit of the resources of the library; and further, the librarian's knowledge should be preserved in the card catalog, so that his assistants or successor may have the benefit of it. Do you realize what this means for the librarian? Go into your own school library and note the number of books in English alone that are school text editions. Think what it means to read the introductions and notes of these and make cards for the important material. Remember that the material found in such places is generally not found elsewhere in the school library, for the editors of school texts draw on much larger collections. Then ask yourself if there is not in the librarian's work a great deal to be done which might help you in *your* work, and whether this work is not of enough importance to warrant its recognition as part of the regular school duties of the librarian.

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